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SIPDIS

STATE FOR L/LEI - H. COLLUMS AND G. HARRIS
DOJ FOR DOJ/OIA - J. LEHTMAN
BUENOS AIRES FOR LEGATT, A. RODRIGUEZ

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: EXTRADITION: PARAGUAY: CARLOS IVAN MENDES MESQUITA

REF: 04 STATE 266217

1. Summary. Carlos Ivan Mendes Mesquita, a Brazilian-born narcotrafficker with FARC connections, was handed over to U.S. custody on June 27 at approximately 8:10 a.m. The successful conclusion to the six-month legal process is a step forward for Paraguay, marking the first time it has extradited a fugitive of this significance to the United States. By resisting pressure and corruption, the GOP has demonstrated a renewed commitment to fighting international crime and terrorism. End summary.

2. On June 24, the judge of first instance signed the final extradition order for Mesquita, putting an end to the six month legal process that commenced shortly after Mesquita's arrest in November 2004. (Comment: this was extraordinarily fast by Paraguayan standards. End comment.) A noted narcotrafficker with ties to the FARC, Mesquita had been living relatively openly in Paraguay since his escape from prison in Brazil, even obtaining a Paraguayan identity card with forged documents. His arrest in a drug bust conducted by the SENAD unit of the police was in itself a significant event, given that Mesquita enjoyed the protection of other Paraguayan police officers. The protection of investigative information and intelligence and the complex end-game in a remote location were major achievements. Since that time, he has remained under special custody and round-the-clock surveillance. The government of Brazil closely cooperated on the case, providing information used in the arrest and agreeing not to seek Mesquita's extradition so as not to complicate the legal case.

3. Given the insecurity of Paraguayan prisons and fearing a violent escape attempt or corruption leading to his release, the GOP has from the beginning favored our request to extradite Mesquita. However, unlike the past, this willingness was matched by determined follow-through. In the face of threats to break Mesquita out of jail, the judiciary and the police persevered, with SENAD Minister Hugo Ibarra and Supreme Court President Antonio Fretes personally involving themselves at every step of the way. The high-level attention yielded results, as the case made it through the court system in six months, as opposed to the more usual years.

4. Comment: This success, as well as the extradition of three other Brazilians traffickers to Brazil in May, demonstrates a renewed commitment by the GOP to aggressively pursue drug traffickers and terrorists and to resist pressure and bribes to release them.

KEANE